GIORDANO BRUNO

MYSTIC AND MARTYR

By

EVA MARTIN

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EVA MARTIN

"O wronged, untamable, unshaken
Soul of divinely-suffering man!"

LAURENCE BINYON

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1921

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GIORDANO BRUNO

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE AND TRAVELS

GIORDANO BRUNO is one of the most remarkable figures in the history of the Middle Ages. Ardent champion of freedom of thought in an age hide-bound by tradition, impetuous, brilliant, enthusiastic, and daring, he has been well described as "a comet that flashed across Europe." "This blazing spark of a fiery life" is the expression used by another writer; while a third has declared that "the red glow of Bruno's funeral pyre was the rosy dawn of modern thought in Europe."

Yet in what serene and peaceful surroundings did this "fiery life" have its beginning! Bruno was born in May, 1548, in a hamlet outside the walls of Nola, an ancient town some miles from Naples, and his early childhood was spent amid the soft, sweet airs of this vine-bearing plain, called by its inhabitants *Cam-*

pagna Felice, or "the happy country." From there he passed through how many different environments, how many dangerous wanderings and vicissitudes, before the inevitable end, which overtook him on a spot named, as though with tragic irony, the "Field of Flowers" (*Campo dei Fiori*), in Rome!

Thus did the pioneer of mental liberty in Europe tread his "way of the cross" from the Campagna Felice to the Campo dei Fiori; and perhaps from the point of view of his eager, truth-seeking spirit the names were less inappropriate than they may seem to those who look only on the outward and visible events of a man's life.

Of his parents little is known. His mother's name was Fraulissa—probably derived from some family connection with the German troops who are known to have settled in the neighbourhood of Naples. His father, Gioan Bruno, was a soldier, but seems to have been also a man of literary tastes, for Tansillo, the Neapolitan poet and courtier, was one of his friends. Their child was christened Filippo, or Felipe (the name of Giordano being a later acquisition), and even in very early years evinced signs of an extraordinarily alert mind and acute powers of observation. He himself relates how once, when a mere infant in

swaddling-clothes, he was awakened from sleep by a snake gliding into the room. His cries brought his father rushing in to kill the intruder, and some years afterwards he astonished his parents by recounting the whole incident, even to the very words uttered by the father in his excitement.

Further evidence of his highly-developed powers of observation and memory is afforded by the references to his early surroundings in many of his books. The inhabitants of Nola are introduced into some of his satirical and philosophical dialogues, and he recalls numerous small incidents and details of the daily life by which he was surrounded in childhood. A deep and undying love of his early home seems to have possessed him, for he speaks of it as a place "blessed of heaven," thinks longingly of "the golden fields of Nola," and frequently refers to himself as "the Nolan," and to his philosophy as "the Nolanese." The peasantry of the district had Etruscan blood in their veins. They seem to have been highly imaginative, perhaps superstitious, and inclined to paganism, keeping up many ancient customs and ceremonies which had died out elsewhere. Bruno himself, he tells us, when a child, beheld spirits on the hills, amid the beech-woods and laurel-groves; and he has recorded how he used to

gaze at the far slopes of Vesuvius, thinking them ugly and barren, until one day his father took him there, and he found, to his amazement, that they were covered with trees and vegetation, while the opposite slopes where Nola lay appeared, in their turn, bare and forbidding. So, he says, "I became aware for the first time that sight could deceive," and undoubtedly this object-lesson on the folly of believing without investigation was one that he carried with him through life.

At the age of ten or eleven he was sent to Naples, where he lodged with an uncle, a weaver of velvet. He was evidently far advanced for his years, for he attended public lectures on literature and philosophy, as well as receiving private instruction in logic and dialectic from Fra Teofilo da Varano, an Augustinian monk.

In 1563, at the age of fifteen, he entered the Dominican monastery at Naples, and was renamed Giordano. This name had been borne by the second General of the Order, and was perhaps bestowed on the young novice by reason of the unusual promise he displayed—a promise that was, however, to be fulfilled in a manner differing widely from the expectations of the holy monks and their Prior. Although he took the vows of priesthood in 1572, Bruno

showed signs of independent and unorthodox thought long before then. Having studied the works of Peter of Ravenna, Raymond Lully, and Saint Thomas Aquinas—for whom he always expressed a great love and reverence, and who had been a monk in the same convent three hundred years before—he began, ere long, to express his own views in poetic skits and satires, which did not at all meet with the approval of his superiors. He removed the images of saints from his cell, retaining only a crucifix, and from the age of eighteen seems to have cherished doubts concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. He became acquainted with the works of Copernicus, and was very deeply influenced by them, as well as by those of Nicholas Cusanus. During his years in the monastery he must have studied indefatigably. He spoke Spanish as well as Latin—with which, of course, all educated monks were familiar—and was well acquainted with the Roman classics, and with Italian poets such as Dante, Ariosto, and Tasso. He knew Greek, and his knowledge of Aristotle was said to be unequalled by that of any contemporary scholar; but though, in certain respects, he had a deep admiration for this philosopher, in others (and particularly with regard to the nature and constitution of the cosmos) he opposed,

throughout his life, the Aristotelian conceptions, and brought down endless abuse and condemnation upon his own head in consequence. He was well read, naturally, in the Fathers of the Church, but, more especially, in the Arabian thinkers of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth centuries—Averrhoes, Avicenna, and Avicebron—to whom he often refers in his writings. Neo-Platonism made an irresistible appeal to him. He studied Plotinus exhaustively, as well as Porphyry, Iamblichus, and others of that school; while Pico della Mirandola, Cornelius Agrippa, and Theophrastus Paracelsus all contributed to the moulding of his thought.

Thus early in life did he commence his unwearying pursuit of the goddess Wisdom—her whom he described in later years as

> "Pure, because nothing of defilement can touch her; clear, because she is the brightness of eternal light; inviolate, because she is the spotless mirror of the majesty of God; . . . incomparable, because she is more beautiful than the sun, and brighter than the light of all the stars. Her have I sought from my youth, and desired for my spouse, and have become a lover of her form—and I prayed that she might be sent to abide with me, and work with me, that I might know what I lacked, and what was acceptable to God."

His wide reading, however, contributed to his undoing, for, when he finally fled from Naples—having been accused of heresy in a formidable indictment of 130 articles—the indictment followed him to Rome, together with certain books containing the forbidden annotations of the arch-heretic Erasmus, which he had left behind in the haste of his flight. He found refuge in Rome for a time, but the storm-clouds grew darker, the prison-cell threatened to engulf him, and in 1576 he laid aside his Dominican habit and set forth to wander from land to land and from city to city for a space of nearly sixteen years.

Travelling monks were common enough in those days, and if Bruno had been an ordinary character he would probably have attracted little attention. But it was not his fate to go through life quietly and unobserved. He adopted the rôle of a pilgrim but not of an outcast, and went his way in the spirit of a crusader or a knight-errant, seeking to deliver the minds of men from the bonds that had so long enslaved them. It has been said that "his track was marked by a long succession of agitated assemblies, gesticulating professors, and a general learned uproar"—a statement that can scarcely be accused of exaggeration. In one of his books he expressed the view,

closely resembling that of the ancient Greek philosophers, that the "wise man" was one

"Who, considering evil and good, estimateth the one and the other as variable, . . . whose spirit is neither depressed nor elated, but is moderate in inclinations and temperate in desires. . . . In that way whoso is least sad and least joyful . . . finds himself in the habitation of temperance, where the virtue and condition of a strong soul exist, which bends not to the south wind nor to the north."

But though without any doubt a strong soul, it was hardly possible for one of Bruno's warm southern temperament to fulfil this ideal of moderation. We know that in argument he was outspoken, fiery, often defiant. His zeal and his courage were alike unbounded, but tact and discretion were not virtues he held in high esteem, nor was he by nature liberally endowed with either. He expressed vehement contempt for the lukewarm attitude adopted by the upholders of philosophies differing from his own.

"They indeed may hold a philosophy cheap, which is worth nothing, or one that they are not acquainted with ; but he who has found the Truth, the hid Treasure, is enchanted with the beauty of her countenance, and jealous lest she be misrepresented, slighted, or profaned."

Fervour, sincerity, and an unswerving loyalty to what he believed to be the truth—these seem to have been the most striking personal characteristics of Giordano Bruno. Of his personal appearance we know little, but we gather from various sources—how far reliable it is hard to say—that he was small and of slender build, having, according to one account, a short chestnut-coloured beard, according to another, a black one; that he spoke earnestly and rapidly, with lively gestures; and that his expression was vivacious and constantly changing in harmony with his thoughts. One of his pupils, Raphael Eglin, has left us a vivid pen-picture of how, "standing on one foot, he would both think and dictate as fast as pen could follow, so rapid was his mind, so forceful his spirit"; while he describes himself as "rough-hewn by nature; not learned in smoothing the hair, colouring the cheek, crowning the head with the fragrant hyacinth, unbending to the dance, or tuning harsh accents to a ditty."

No frilled and polished courtier, no gentle dilettante, was our famous Nolan, but a man quick in speech as in action; profound of thought; brimful of ardour and enthusiasm; not without a certain vanity concerning his own clear-sightedness in an age blinded by

tradition and prejudice; deeply religious in the broadest and truest sense of the word; impetuous, excitable, and often indiscreet; "passionate in defence of what seemed to him true, equally passionate in hatred of what seemed to him false"; possessed of a biting wit, an amazing eloquence, and an unbounded imagination; poet and pioneer, philosopher and prophet, mystic and scientist in one. No wonder if his passage through life left behind it an impression comparable only to that made by a flaming comet in a dark sky.

He travelled first of all to Genoa, where he happened to witness a religious ceremony—the exhibiting of an ass's tail, accompanied by the collection of alms from deluded worshippers who believed it to be that of the ass on which our Lord entered Jerusalem—to which he afterwards referred more than once in accents of derision and scorn. Then for a few months he settled at Noli, some forty miles from Genoa, supporting himself by teaching grammar to children, and "the Sphere"—which seems to have been astronomy with a dash of metaphysics—to a few earnest inquirers. Next he went by way of Savona and Turin to Venice, which city seemed to offer the wanderer a fairly safe refuge from the Inquisition. But the question of livelihood became insistent, for

Venice had been in the grip of the plague for two years past, half the inhabitants had been swept out of existence (among them the aged Titian), and everything was in a state of confusion and terror. In order—to quote his own words—" to furnish me with a few pieces to live on," Bruno here issued a pamphlet (since lost) on " The Signs of the Times " ; but the proceeds were probably meagre, for he soon journeyed on to Padua, and, following the advice of some Dominican brothers whom he met there, reassumed the monkish habit which, except for the scapular, he had temporarily discarded.

By way of Bergamo and Brescia he came to Milan, but we know little of what befell him there, except that in the latter city he first heard of his future friend and helper, Sir Philip Sidney, who had been travelling in Italy a few years before, and had had his portrait painted by Paolo Veronese.

Finally Bruno decided to leave Italian soil, and made his way over the snows of Mont Cenis to Chambéry, where he found shelter, not unaccompanied by distrust and suspicion, at a Dominican monastery. An Italian monk who chanced to be there told him that he need not expect any friendly reception in those parts, whereupon he abandoned his intention of

going to Lyons, and took the route for Geneva instead.

Here he inscribed his name at the Academy, and the entry in his own firm handwriting may still be read in the Rector's Register—" Philippus Brunus Nolanus, sacræ theologiæ professor, 20 May, 1579." There was in Geneva at that time a colony of Italian refugees, their most distinguished member being the Neapolitan Marquis di Vico, who soon visited his fellow-countryman, seeing in him, no doubt, the possibility of a glorious convert to Calvinism. The city was, of course, at this time a stronghold of the Reformed Church, and di Vico himself had forsaken wife and children in order to become one of Calvin's staunchest adherents.

Bruno told his visitor that he had no intention of adopting the new faith, as he did not even know what it was, and desired only to live in freedom and safety; but he followed di Vico's advice so far as to discard his monastic habit, this time for ever, and has left us a pleasant picture of his own ingenuity and versatility in recording that he " made trunk-hose and other gear from some stuff I had by me " (probably that of his habit), and that di Vico and other Italians " gave me a sword, hat, cloak, and other needful clothes, and other things, that I might support myself by correct-

ing proofs. I remained two months thus employed, going sometimes to hear Italians and Frenchmen expound and preach."

But though the trunk-hose—albeit homemade!—the sword, and the proof-reading were no doubt congenial enough, the grim doctrines of Calvinism were not likely to appeal deeply to one endowed with so poetical and imaginative a nature. His inquiring mind naturally led him to listen to the sermons of the Reformers and to study their writings; but he declared later that he had done so "not to acquire their doctrine or for improvement—for I think them more ignorant than myself—but out of sheer curiosity."

His desire to live in Geneva in freedom and safety was not granted for any length of time, and for this he himself seems to have been chiefly responsible. Before two months had passed he issued a pamphlet containing "objections and invectives" against a fellow-member of the Academy, a Professor of Philosophy, whom he accused of having made twenty erroneous statements in the course of a single lecture. There are contemporary records which suggest that the Aristotelian philosophy was the bone of contention, in which case Bruno now, with characteristic audacity—for the professor whom he attacked

was one of the most influential personages in Geneva—inaugurated a campaign which was to occupy the best years of his life, and involve him in many subsequent controversies. Both he and the man whom he had persuaded to print the pamphlet were arrested on August 6th, 1579. The printer was let off with a fine after one day's imprisonment, but a week seems to have gone by before Bruno, admitting that he had offended and undertaking to withdraw the pamphlet, was set free, after being severely reprimanded by the Council. One wonders what this early experience of the prison-cell meant to one whose freedom-loving spirit was doomed later to endure so many years of it. In any case, it showed him that Geneva offered no safe abiding-place for such as he, and, making haste to quit it before further disaster befell, he set forth on his travels once more, journeying by way of Lyons to Toulouse.

Here he quickly made new acquaintances, and for six months gave private lessons in astronomy and philosophy, afterwards taking a doctor's degree and obtaining an appointment as Professor of Philosophy at the famous university, which at that time boasted ten thousand students. He remained in Toulouse for two years, writing and teaching, but left it in 1581 on account of the civil wars which

were raging in those parts and interrupting the studious life of the university town. Possibly there were other reasons for his departure, for teachings so revolutionary as his were not likely to go long unchallenged; but, however that may be, we find him next in Paris, giving a series of lectures on "The Thirty Divine Attributes according to the Doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas."

His eloquence and originality attracted large crowds, and his vigorous personality impressed all who came to hear him. So great was the success of the lectures that he followed them up with a second course on the mnemonic art of Lully. These again excited general admiration, and brought him a summons from King Henry III, who was anxious to find out whether the lecturer's remarkable memory was due to magic arts or to a natural gift. Bruno was able to assure him that there was nothing magical about it, and soon afterwards brought out a book, *The Shadows of Ideas*, which he dedicated to the King. He had already been offered a professorship in Paris, but had been obliged to decline it, as it was impossible for him, an excommunicated person, to fulfil the condition of attending mass, which was attached to all ordinary professorships. King Henry, however, was so pleased with the book that he

rewarded its author with an "extraordinary" lectureship and a salary, and for a time Bruno's path through life seems to have been as smooth as was possible for one of so iconoclastic a temperament. From various sources we gather hints that his teachings were strongly disapproved of in certain quarters and that his zeal, as ever, outran his caution. The King, nevertheless, stood by him—a fact to be recorded in favour of one whose instability was common knowledge—and when Bruno left Paris in 1583 on a visit to England he bore with him a letter of recommendation from King Henry to Michel de Castelnau, French Ambassador at the Court of Queen Elizabeth.

CHAPTER II

LONDON, OXFORD, AND PARIS

On arrival in England Bruno presented his credentials to Castelnau, and betook himself to Oxford, where he opened his campaign in flamboyant fashion by presenting to the Vice-Chancellor of the University an address which ran as follows:

"Jordanus Brunus, of Nola, lover of God, professor of pure and blameless wisdom, philosopher known, approved, and honourably entreated by the foremost Academies of Europe, stranger to none save churls and barbarians, awakener of souls from slumber, queller of presumptuous and stubborn ignorance; who showeth in all his actions the love he beareth to all men, whether Briton or Italian, male or female, whether carrying the mitre or the crown, the gown or the sword, whether frocked or unfrocked; but who chiefly inclines towards those who are peaceable, enlightened, sincere, and thoughtful; who seeks not the anointed head or the sacred brow, the washed hand or him that is circumcised, but rather those true

lineaments of man which be his soul and understanding; one whom foolish talkers and hypocrites abhor, whom upright and earnest men love, whom noble souls receive with acclamation—to the honoured and noble Vice-Chancellor of Oxford and to his fellows, greeting."

No doubt some allowance must be made for the customs of an age which made free use of pompous and grandiloquent language. Still, a greeting such as this must have caused the worthy dons to open widely both eyes and ears, and was a fitting prelude to the storms of indignation and fury which the newcomer's lectures speedily aroused. Oxford, like the European universities, was at that time still in the grip of Aristotle, and any attempt to question or throw doubt upon his theories was looked upon as presumption, or even sacrilege. Bruno paid small heed to such prejudices. An "awakener of souls" and "queller of ignorance" cannot afford to pay homage to long-established beliefs which have enslaved the minds of men. He threw down the gauntlet, boldly refuted the Aristotelian teachings as to the nature of the universe, and offered in their place a philosophy founded on the theories of Copernicus, then considered wild and revolutionary in the extreme. While admitting that Aristotle was himself "a learned and judicious

gentleman," he described his followers as "parrots," "sophists," and "subtle metaphysicians of the cowl"—language which was hardly likely to fall favourably upon the ears of his audience. But the preservation of peace and concord was not Bruno's mission in life. Far from avoiding disputes, he welcomed them, "for," he says, "by stirring, stimulating, surprising, contradicting, exciting men's minds, they are made fruitful; and this, according to Socrates, is a salutary vocation."

It happened that at this time a Polish prince, noted for his learning, paid a visit to Oxford, and, at several public debates held in honour of the distinguished guest, Bruno defended his new teachings against various doctors of theology of the reigning school. He claims to have had the best of the argument throughout. In his *Ash Wednesday Supper* he writes of England as being "ruled by a constellation of pedants who exhibit obstinacy, ignorance, and presumption, mixed up with such boorish rudeness that it might provoke the patience of Job"; and continues:

"Should you doubt, go to Oxford and get them to tell you about what happened to the Nolan when he disputed publicly with these Doctors of Theology before Prince Laskin, the Pole, and certain English nobles. Learn how

they replied to his argument and how, on that great occasion, a wretched doctor got stuck, like a chicken in stubble, fifteen times, in the fifteen syllogisms he propounded as Coryphæus of the University. Hear how vulgar and violent the pig was, and how patient and forbearing was the other, who showed his Neapolitan breeding and rearing under a kindly sky. Ask how they put a stop to his public lectures, both on the Immortality of the Soul and on the Quintuple Sphere."

The epithet "pig" applied to an opponent may have been but a mild form of abuse in those days of strong and scurrilous language, but the upshot of the affair was that, Bruno's license to lecture being withdrawn, he returned to London, filled with contemptuous disdain for his opponents and their "seat of learning."

"From these doctors and from hunger," he tells us, he was rescued by Castelnau, who, although himself in considerable financial difficulties, provided the stranger with a home—probably in return for help with secretarial and other work—and introduced him at Court. Queen Elizabeth seems to have taken pleasure in conversing with him in Italian, and he quickly aroused the interest of such men as Fulke Greville and Sir Philip Sidney, two of his most notable works being dedicated to the

latter, though from the former, it appears, he became estranged by reason of his too great outspokenness.

Although Bruno's sojourn in England was probably one of the happiest—and, with regard to mental work, certainly one of the most productive—periods of his life, he had little good to say of the people—who, he declared, yielded "to none other in disrespect, outlandishness, boorishness, savagery, and bad bringing up"—or of the language, which he scorned to learn, deeming it only "fit for dogs." But he could scarcely find words to express his admiration for the English ladies, and we have a few interesting glimpses of his home life in the French Ambassador's family. He speaks of Castelnau's little daughter—who died a year or two later—as playing various instruments "so that one wonders whether she be flesh or spirit, and from her already ripe and noble bearing, whether she be of earth or have come down from the skies"; and of his wife as "of no mean beauty, which indeed is a fit clothing to her soul; she is a lady of judgment, prudence, modesty, and polite dignity."

Nevertheless, so incorrigible a firebrand as the Nolan was probably no easy guest to entertain. In addition to the Oxford uproar,

we hear rumours of certain troublous episodes in London, and for some time after the publication of his *Ash Wednesday Supper*, with its severe criticisms of the English people, Bruno dared not venture into the streets, but had to remain in hiding. It must be said, however, that in later years he made handsome amends to the land that had given him shelter, speaking of it as " a beautiful, fortunate, and chivalrous country," and even admitting that the University of Oxford was " founded on an excellent basis."

In spite of his lack of discretion and not infrequent irritability, his personality was, without doubt, one of great power and charm. The Castelnaus' friendship and loyalty towards him never wavered, and his appreciation of it is expressed more than once in the warmest possible language. He dedicated four of his works to the Ambassador, and in each case offered grateful thanks for the courteous hospitality and gentle and honourable treatment received from him. An extract from one of these dedications will bear witness not only to the Nolan's unfailing gift of eloquence, but to the genuine warmth and spontaneity of his feelings.

" Those beholden to me," he writes, " are

beholden to the Muses, and those beholden to the Muses are in truth beholden to you, who favour and guard them continually. For they are native to every soil, and not alien here, since, though an Italian scholar in distant Britain, you have extended to them the royal hospitality of France. Farewell! I thank you; and I would have you know him for ever bound to you for whom you have changed England into Italy, London into Nola, and the perils of a strange land into the sacred ties of home."

When the Ambassador was recalled from England in 1585 Bruno returned with him to Paris; but Castelnau's fortunes were now at a very low ebb, and, to make matters worse, both he and his friend were robbed on the journey. Arriving practically destitute on French soil, Bruno seems to have supported himself for some months, precariously enough, by teaching, and perhaps by proof-reading; but it was not his nature to remain long in obscurity, and presently, through the medium of the Spanish Ambassador, Mendoza, we find him raising the question of his excommunication, and begging to be received back into the Church. His hopes were too high; his views too wide. No doubt it seemed to him that some means of reconciliation between the

Church and the independent thinker should be possible, but both the French Nuncio and the Jesuit Father, Spagnuolo, with whom he discussed his case, made it their business to disabuse him of any such idea, and assured him that nothing could be done unless he obtained absolution from the Pope and re-entered the Dominican order. This was far from Bruno's desire, and he remarks with some bitterness that he was even warned not to attend the divine offices, though he might listen to sermons and say his prayers in church—a meagre concession indeed!

A Dutchman named Van Buchel, with whom he came into contact, at this time describes him as "a philosopher who is more subtle than is good for his safety," and in the diary of M. Cotin, Librarian to the Abbey of St. Victor, are recorded various conversations between himself and Bruno, in the course of which the latter expressed views which certainly were not likely to reinstate him in the good graces of the Roman Church.

He seems to have abandoned the attempt at reconciliation, and next devoted himself to the preparation of *A Hundred and Twenty Theses Concerning Nature and the Universe, directed against the Peripatetics,* in which he summed up with remarkable clearness and

precision the points of divergence between his own and the Aristotelian philosophy.

The Theses were printed and presented to the Rector of the Sorbonne, who arranged that a public debate on the subject should be held at Whitsuntide, 1586. According to custom, Bruno's opinions were defended by one of his pupils, a youth named John Hennequin; but, in spite of the eloquence with which the theme and his master's influence seem to have inspired him, he was soon shouted down, and the affair ended in a regular "students' rag." No doubt the speaker's vehement declarations of contempt for the habit of belief, which "more than aught else hinders the human understanding," for the general tendency to "think as the multitude, merely because it is the multitude, though "the opinions of never so many men cannot make truth other than she is," were largely responsible, as well as the novel views he expressed—in marked contrast to the Aristotelian theories—concerning an ever-revolving earth and a limitless universe containing innumerable worlds.

After this tumultuous scene Bruno evidently realised that Paris offered him no permanent foothold, and decided to turn his steps towards Germany, the land of the great Copernicus whom he had so long honoured and admired.

CHAPTER III

WANDERINGS THROUGH GERMANY

A DIFFICULT and no doubt far from luxurious journey of nearly five hundred miles brought the traveller to Mainz, where he spent twelve days in a fruitless search for some means of livelihood. He went on to Marburg, hoping to be welcomed at the university, but found, to his disgust, that the spirit of the place was too fiercely Protestant for him even to be allowed a hearing, the right to lecture in public being refused him by the rector, Nigidius. The latter has recorded with considerable indignation how Bruno " blazed forth and insulted me in my house, as though I had acted, in this matter, contrary to the law of nations," and how at his own request his name was struck off the university roll.

The wanderer next made his way to Wittenberg, and here better fortune awaited him, for he was received with friendliness and cordiality by the resident professors, and allowed to take private pupils on account of his poverty. He expressed his gratitude for this treatment in

terms as warm as those in which he had, apparently, given vent to very different sentiments at Marburg.

> "You have received and maintained me [he wrote, in dedicating one of his books to the Senate of the University about a year later], you have dealt kindly with me up to this day. I was a stranger to you, a fugitive, . . . having no ensigns of honour, unproved and unquestioned as to your faith. . . . You took me heartily as a guest, and descried my name worthy to be written in the book of your University, and myself to be numbered with the loftiest and most learned among you."

But this pleasant atmosphere of religious toleration and philosophic liberty was too good to last. Before long the Calvinistic party, which had always looked somewhat askance at Bruno, gained the upper hand in the university, and he felt the time had come for him to leave. He therefore prepared a long and impassioned farewell oration, which he delivered before the Senate on March 8th, 1588, and in which he compared himself to Paris, confronted with the task of choosing between the three goddesses, Juno, Minerva, and Venus.

> "They bestow the prize on Juno [he says], who aspire after high place, treasure, princi-

palities, kingdoms, and empires; they seek Minerva who prefer judgment, wisdom, and understanding before all other gifts; and such as love friends, comrades, a life of ease, and the exquisite intercourse of beauty, will give the prize to Venus. . . . Would you know who is the star and goddess of my adoration? What can I say of her? . . . For, though she looked upon me with a dark and threatening aspect (by which I knew she was not Venus, but Minerva), she drew me to her, and fettered me, as with a magic spell. . . . True philosophers are few, but princes and marshals are many; and they who have seen Venus and Juno in the fulness of their beauty are more in number than those beholding Minerva clad in arms. . . . She was equipped with a shining and terrible helmet, which overshadowed the virginal sweetness of her face, since no man is so defenceless that, having succeeded in approaching her, he cannot the better repel the onslaughts of fortune or bear them wisely. . . . Minerva would have us learn how vain a thing is the very height of man's power against the truth of God; and how vain, too, in the sons of man are audacity, presumption, and the foolish imaginings of ignorance. . . . She is an inexhaustible treasure of wealth, and he who participates in her benefits attains the friendship of God. And, since in friendship all is for the common good, he who has wisdom is rich. What can Juno bestow which is not within the gift of Minerva? What are the

beauties of Venus which thou canst not behold in Minerva? I have loved her with my whole soul from my youth up."

This passage is typical of Bruno's mode of thought and of his whole outlook on life. Never for a single day or hour does he seem to have swerved from his devotion to the goddess whose praises he so fervently sings, and who, in her turn, bestowed upon him gifts which, if they did not enable him to repel "the onslaughts of fortune," did indeed give him the strength to "bear them wisely."

The rest of the oration is concerned with an enthusiastic expression of his gratitude to Germany and his sense of her spiritual greatness. Here he claims to have found—

"The house of Wisdom, for whom I suffer poverty willingly. . . . Out of exile came the lesson of adversity, for in the suffering that endures but for a moment I have found length of rest; out of my light affliction came the fulness of joy, and in the barrenness of exile were the consolations of my kindred and my country. . . . For I came to you a stranger and a pilgrim, outlawed, the sport of fate, small of stature, poor in fortune and in defenders, oppressed by the hatred of the multitude, . . . and you, O most learned, grave, and courteous senators, did not despise me; you have not rejected the Nolan philosophy. . . .

Lending no ear to my enemies, you displayed the virtues of your courtesy and forbearance to the whole of the world. . . . How, O Jove, shall I declare my gratitude ? "

In the course of his speech he extolled the learning and the greatness of many famous Germans, among them Martin Luther, whose reformatory spirit he could not but admire, but with whose beliefs he had, as a matter of fact, small sympathy.

If his adulation of the arch-foe of Rome had been less impassioned it might have gone better with him later when the Inquisition had him in its grip. But Bruno was no believer in half-measures, either of praise or blame. Moderation found no harbourage in his heart, or on his tongue ; and, having delivered his eulogy, he set out, full of confidence, for Prague, a stronghold of Catholicism.

However, if fortune did not, in this instance, actively favour the brave, neither was she altogether adverse. Though the newcomer did not receive the warm welcome he had hoped for, his dedication of a paper *Against the Mathematicians and Philosophers of this Age* to the Emperor Rudolf II brought him a gift of three hundred thalers, which, if not exactly munificent, was at any rate better than a rebuff. In this dedication Bruno expressed

with much beauty his ideal of " a religion of love which shall be no cause of controversy and above dispute," and with much vigour his detestation of those who " enforce their own prejudices with fire and sword." While not desiring to criticise Christianity, he saw how " authority usually binds and deceives in countless ways," and how the thinker must free himself from " subjection to any other mind." " Thus do we go forth to the most delightful splendour of light, understand Nature (which is crying aloud to be heard), and follow Wisdom (which we hold supreme above all) with singleness of spirit and an honest heart." All of which serves to show the breadth and the greatness of his mind, but at the same time his extraordinary blindness in conceiving it possible for one holding such views to be welcomed back into the arms of the mother Church.

After some months in Prague he was invited by Duke Julius of Brunswick, an enlightened thinker, to move to the University of Helmstadt, but the rosy prospect which thus seemed to open out before him was closed almost immediately by the Duke's death. Bruno delivered an enthusiastic funeral oration, in which he spoke of himself as having escaped from the hungry jaws of the " Roman wolf,"

and of the "Papal tyranny" as having "infected the world with the rankest poison of ignorance and vice"—and once again his unconsidered language was to stand him in no good stead later on. Soon afterwards he was in trouble once more, and there is still in existence a letter in which he protests against having been publicly excommunicated by the chief Pastor of Helmstadt, and demands that his accuser be summoned to "show cause and prove his fulmination to be that of a good shepherd and not the effect of private malice."

There is no evidence to prove that Bruno was ever a member of the Protestant Church, but pupils were not likely to come to one who had been formally denounced by it; so that, his protest going unheeded, he soon found himself a pilgrim once more.

In July 1590 he reached Frankfort, preceded, evidently, by no favourable report, for in the Burgomaster's Book it is stated that when he sought a lodging at the house of John Wechel, the printer, it was "resolved that his petition be refused and that he be told to take his penny elsewhere." In spite of this, however, Wechel—whose guest Sidney had formerly been—contrived to get him received at the Carmelite monastery, and undertook to print several of his works in Latin.

A period of outer quietness and intense inner activity now began. For a time, at least, the wanderer had found a peaceful refuge, and he took the opportunity to write, read, meditate, and discuss theology with " heretical doctors " —according to the Prior of the monastery, who subsequently described him as " a man of fine intellect and erudition—a universal man "—but " without a trace of religion." The good Prior, of course, used the word " religion " in its narrowest sense, meaning the religion in which he personally believed, but his description of his guest as " a universal man " is one that could scarcely be bettered.

Soon, however, the first shadow of future fate fell across Bruno's path. He met in Frankfort a Venetian bookseller, Ciotto, who carried some of his works back to Venice, where they attracted the notice of a young nobleman, Giovanni Mocenigo. Mocenigo presently wrote to Bruno, begging him to come to Venice and give him instruction in the Art of Lully and other sciences. The proposal was made in all apparent sincerity, and it had considerable attractions. Certain elements in Frankfort were becoming distinctly unfriendly to the philosopher; Venice was a city where art and intellect flourished freely, she, alone among Italian States, having been to a large extent

successful in resisting the Papal encroachments on individual liberty; an offer of free board and lodging was not one to be despised; and last, but not least, came the desire to see once more his native land, perhaps even, eventually, to look again upon that "happy country" where his childhood's days had been spent—for though Bruno had written of himself as "citizen and servant of the world, child of the sun and mother earth," yet the love of Italy burned ever in his heart.

Mocenigo renewed his invitation with fervent protestations of friendliness, and at last Bruno, though knowing that his would-be host was an ardent Catholic and held the ominous distinction of having acted as an official of the Inquisition—perhaps even thinking that it might be an advantage to return under the protection of such an one—fell in with his proposal, and arrived in Venice in October 1591.

Contentious and passionate he might be, simple-hearted and trustful he certainly was. No thought of what lay in store for him seems to have crossed his mind. He walked straight into the trap, unwarned and unsuspecting, ever ready to believe that all with whom he had dealings must be as sincere and broadminded as he was himself.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE GRIP OF THE INQUISITION

For some reason Bruno did not at once take up his abode with Mocenigo in Venice. We hear of his being in lodgings, and he apparently paid a visit of several months to Padua, lecturing there to German students. But in March 1592 he returned to Venice, and this time accepted his pupil's urgent and oft-repeated invitation.

Once having got him under his roof, Mocenigo proceeded to draw the net more tightly. It is difficult to say exactly by what motives he was actuated; whether he had had a secret hankering after instruction in the Black Arts, and desired a mean revenge on finding that Bruno's teachings did not include them (Bruno himself has stated that "he not only wished me to teach him all I know, but desired to learn what I am unable to teach anybody"); or whether he was entirely under the influence of his confessor, and allowed himself to be used as a tool from the beginning. In any case, he is

revealed in the documents that still exist as a shallow, cunning, and treacherous character devoid of frankness, gratitude, or any true nobility. When he wrote to the Inquisitors to thank them for their forbearance in "pardoning my error in delaying my tardy accusation," he added :

> "I could not get at the whole matter at once, nor did I know the vileness of the man until I had kept him in my house some two months, . . . and then I desired to get the better of him. . . . I have always assured myself of being able to bring him under the censure of the Holy Office."

Bruno must before long have become aware of his pupil's weak mental and moral calibre, but he seems to have gone about Venice quite unsuspectingly, frequenting the bookshops and literary clubs, and even harbouring new hopes of that reconciliation with the Church that he had so long desired. Some of his German friends expressed astonishment, and even horror, at his temerity in re-entering Italy. He himself was engaged in interviewing certain Neapolitan Fathers as to the possibility of his being allowed "to wear the clerical habit, but free from monastic authority," and in preparing a work on the *Seven Liberal Arts*, which he

intended to present to the new Pope, Clement VIII, in the hope of receiving absolution in return.

Presently, however, some doubts seem to have visited him. Possibly he was warned in secret of Mocenigo's real intentions towards him. At any rate he announced, on May 21st, that he purposed returning to Frankfort in order to get certain of his works printed. Mocenigo objected, saying that he had not yet received the instruction he desired or that had been promised him. Bruno replied by packing his effects and arranging for their removal to Frankfort. Mocenigo then used threats, declaring darkly that he would find means to compel him to stay, whereupon Bruno retorted that he had nothing to fear from the Inquisition, for he had never prevented any man from living according to his religious beliefs. The next night Mocenigo broke into his teacher's bedroom, accompanied by a servant and several gondoliers, forced him to rise, and locked him in a garret, from which he was removed later to a cellar, and finally to the prison of the Holy Office.

A fairly complete account of the trial exists in contemporary records of the most absorbing interest. It began on May 29th and ended on July 30th, with several gaps of days or

weeks between the various stages. Bruno was called upon to give a full account of his life and his philosophy, and did so with as much frankness and calmness as though he had been in a lecture-hall addressing a class of students. He repeatedly denied having taught anything contrary to the Catholic Faith, declaring that his writings were purely philosophical, and upholding the view—not unrecognised in those days—that "philosophy and theology, science and faith, may exist together, even when they maintain contrary doctrines." He admitted that he did not wish to defend or endorse all his published writings, but gave a detailed and reasoned accounts of his beliefs concerning God, the Universe, and Nature.

"I hold the universe to be infinite, as result of the infinite divine power, . . . wherefore I have expounded that there is an endless number of individual worlds like our earth. I regard it, with Pythagoras, as a star, and the moon, the planets, and the stars are similar to it, the latter being of endless number. . . . Within this universe I place a universal Providence, whereby everything lives, grows, acts, and abides in its perfection. . . . I conceive of three attributes—power, wisdom, and goodness; or mind, understanding, and love."

He confessed that he had "doubted and

wrestled in spirit" concerning the Incarnation, but denied having asserted that Christ was a magician, and not divine. "I marvel," he exclaimed, "that you should ask such a question. Never did I say or think such a thing about Christ. I believe as Holy Mother Church does concerning Him." And we read in the official document that, as he so spoke "he grew very sorrowful," and again repeated, "I cannot conceive how such things can be imputed to me."

These questions, and indeed all the accusations brought against him, were, of course, based on Mocenigo's written denouncement—a bewildering mixture of truth, half-truth, and falsehood with which it would have needed a less honest mind than Bruno's to deal successfully.

When asked if he had studied astrology, or any other "magical arts," he replied that he "despised conjuration and never attributed any efficacy to it," but that he had desired to examine judicial astrology, if he could have had the necessary leisure and quietness. Asked again if he had said that Christ wrought His miracles by Black Art, and that he could have done them as well himself, he exclaimed, with characteristic vehemence, that he "would rather be dead than have said anything of the kind,"

and demanded, "Who has invented these devilries?" Again and again his residence in heretical countries, and his praises of Queen Elizabeth of England and other heretics, were brought up against him, and he was reminded that he had had many dealings with heretics and had attended their sermons. He replied that he had done so merely out of "intellectual curiosity," and that he had praised heretics "for their human virtues, not for their religious opinions." But all his statements and explanations merely evoked further adjurations to renounce and express hatred of his "heretical opinions," just as though he had never denied holding such opinions; and finally he was driven to declare—though without retracting any of his philosophical doctrines—"I hate and detest all the errors I have at any time committed as regards the Catholic Faith and decrees of Holy Church," while again repeating his oft-expressed desire to be readmitted into the Church's bosom "with remedies proper to salvation and showing mercy."

No mercy, however, was forthcoming. At subsequent sittings various witnesses were examined, most of whom spoke up for Bruno's integrity and lack of offence against the Catholic religion. He himself was left in his cell from June 4th to July 30th, and then once more

brought before his judges and subjected to a weary repetition of the same insidious charges, the same subtle questionings. Weakened by the confinement and suspense, which must have been torture to his restless and freedom-loving spirit, and overwhelmed, no doubt, by a realisation of the ominous turn taken by the trial, which he had at first looked upon as "merely a joke," he fell on his knees and humbly demanded pardon, promising, if his life were spared, so to reform it as to wipe out all previous stain. He was asked if he had anything more to reveal, and replied that there was nothing, whereupon he was once more removed to his cell, still in ignorance as to the verdict.

No sentence was pronounced, and the matter lay in abeyance until September 17th, when the heads of the Roman Inquisition sent an urgent request for the prisoner to be delivered into their hands. The High Council of Venice felt that its rights were being interfered with, and quibbled for some time with so much success that it was not until early in 1593 that Bruno was finally handed over, this success of the Papacy being brought about chiefly through the mediation of the Roman procurator, Contarini, an ingenious and clever lawyer. He reminded the Venetian Council that the prisoner

was no ordinary heretic, that indictments had long before been taken out against him, both in Naples and Rome, and that he had spent many years in heretical lands, leading "a licentious and diabolical life." But, added Contarini, after various other accusations, "for the rest he has a mind as excellent and rare as one could wish for, and is of exceptional learning and insight." Strange mixture of condemnation and appreciation!

According to its lights the Venetian Court seems to have conducted the inquiry with moderation and fairness. The prisoner was allowed copies of his own works for reference and quotation when making his defence, his depositions were carefully recorded, and were read over to him so that he might correct any involuntary errors, and many of the difficult points presented by his philosophical doctrines were lightly passed over. But he was allowed no advocate; the whole task of proving his innocence fell on himself alone; he could not in any way communicate with the outer world, nor was he even allowed to know the names of his accusers or of the witnesses, who were examined in his absence. Yet, although the judges were practised hands at drawing fatal admissions from their victims, they seem to have found his case a peculiarly difficult one,

and, their injured pride once appeased, were probably not unwilling to be relieved by Rome of the necessity of coming to a definite decision. The Roman Inquisition, however, though reputedly more severe than the Venetian, either found itself equally nonplussed or else displayed unusual patience and clemency in Bruno's case, the consequence being that he endured the unparalleled ordeal of seven long years in the Roman prison before his fate was finally decided.

It is useless to speculate as to what took place in that ardent, active mind during these dark years. All we know is that any temporary weakness that had overtaken him in the first shock of realisation was completely mastered and subdued. Though still protesting that he only desired to live in peace and harmony with the Church whose religion had been to him "ever the dearest," he was firm in refusing to retract or deny his philosophical teachings. His submission on this point was repeatedly pressed for, and repeatedly refused. What means may have been used, in the silence and darkness of the prison-cell, in the endeavour to extort it, we can only surmise; but we do know that he never faltered, and that all who came in contact with him marvelled at the steadfastness and courage he displayed. Long

before he had written : "If one aspires to the supreme splendour, let him retire as much as he can from union or support into himself, . . . let him be content with one ideal." This, without doubt, he carried into practice when the dark hour came, and it may truly be said of him that when he was "tried" he "came forth as gold."

For the first six years after his removal to Rome history is grimly silent concerning the Nolan, and not until January 1599 have we a record of his being again brought up for examination and again reprieved. Then followed another gap of nine months, and it was not until February 6th, 1600, that sentence of death was finally pronounced, his offences being fully recapitulated, his stubbornness deplored, and the "zeal and brotherly love" shown to him by the Inquisition highly belauded.

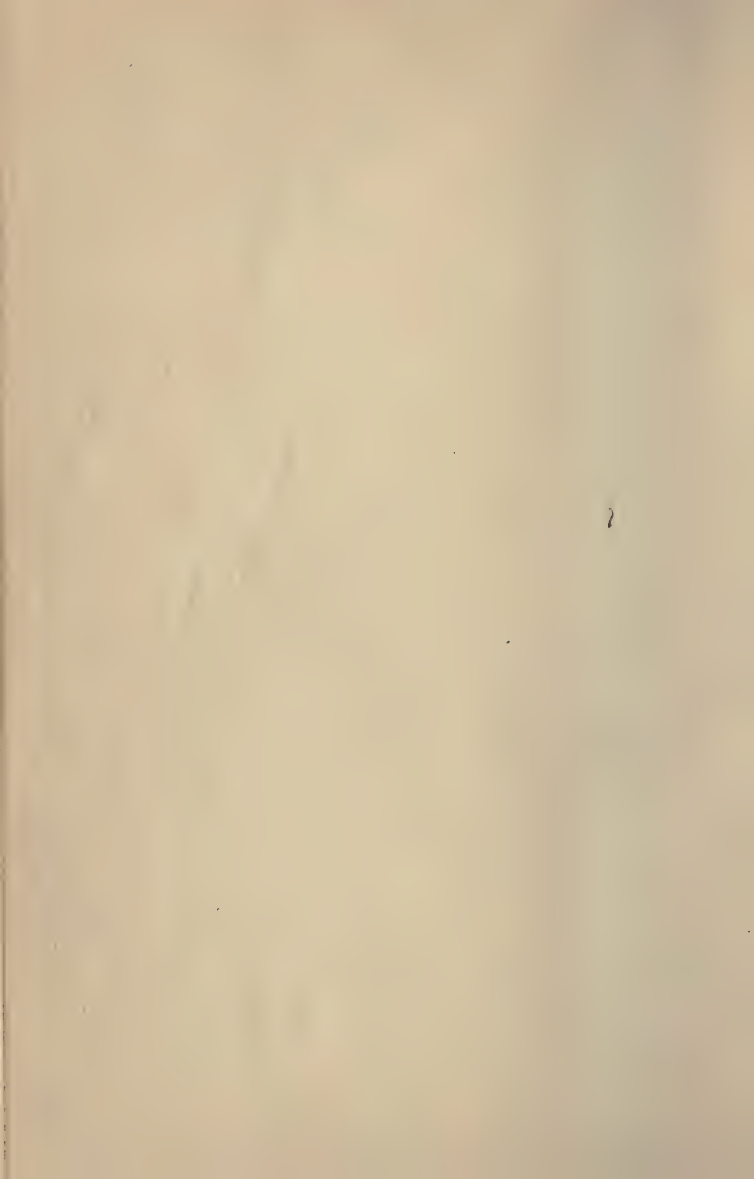
Though forced on to his knees to hear the sentence, his spirit was neither cowed nor humbled. Rising proudly to his feet, he addressed those who had condemned him in words that still ring through the centuries : "It is with greater fear that you pronounce, than I receive, this sentence."

Some few days later a final opportunity for recantation was offered him, and refused. "I die willingly," he declared, "knowing that with

the smoke my soul will ascend to Paradise"—and on the morning of February 17th he was led forth, bare-footed and in chains, to the "Field of Flowers," there gagged, bound to the stake, and burnt to death in the presence of a jeering crowd. Rome was *en fête* just then for the Jubilee of Pope Clement, and the burning of a heretic seemed merely an extra excitement for the holiday-making populace. Eye-witnesses relate that when the crucifix was held to his lips he turned his head aside in disdain. No outer symbols of divine love, divine suffering, were needed by one whose whole life had been spent in the search for divine truth, and whose death bore witness to his unshakable faith in divine goodness. Had not he himself written that the "heroic spirit" shall ever strive on "until it becomes raised to the desire of divine beauty itself, without similitude, figure, symbol, or kind"?

Even as the ashes of his body were scattered to earth and air and reunited with their elements, so, we may believe, did his spirit go forth gladly to be reunited with that "divine beauty and splendour" which—he had declared—"shines and is in all things, . . . near, present, and within, more fully than man himself, being soul of souls, life of lives, essence of essences." And so also, we may hope, did

he experience the truth of his own courageous words—" He who is more deeply moved by the thought of some other thing does not feel the pangs of death."



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